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ABSTRACT

Ideas for fine tuning the awareness and responsive interactions of teachers of infants and toddlers are offered. The ideas, which are supported by theory, research, and clinical experience, focus on the importance of: (1) tender, careful holding of babies; (2) prompt and accurate interpretation of the signals of distress; (3) development of keen observational skills; (4) ages, stages, and milestones of infant development; (5) timetable windows and prerequisite skills needed to meet behavioral objectives; (6) the process of using theoretical ideas to comprehend the dialectics of growth and development; (7) respect for infants' rhythms and tempos; (8) in-depth knowledge of numerous dimensions of children's language development; (9) the process of promoting altruism in babies; (10) provision of pleasurable experiences for infants; (11) the process of working with parents in partnership; (12) the mastering of subtle teaching skills; and (13) caregivers' honing of their metacognitive skills for the purposes of gaining a perspective on their practice, reframing potentially troublesome situations, and renewing their faith in themselves and their intellectual spunk. A table listing indicators of good mental health in infants is included. (RH)

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FOR BABIES TO FLOURISH

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Teachers of preschoolers need to know a great deal about arranging environments for learning. They need to be skilled in group management to promote prosocial peer interactions. They need to be creative at devising science and math experiences to help young children just prior to entry to elementary school to become ready for school learnings in large groups. But the fundamental essence of quality care for infants depends on the intimacy of caregiver relationships with babies.

Babies need special intimate persons to care for them. Quality caregivers of infants work toward understanding infant needs and how to implement the attuned, special relationship with babies that will help them flourish (Honig 1990a; 1990b). Below are offered a baker's dozen of ideas, supported by theory and research and clinical experience, that can be helpful in fine tuning the awareness and responsive interactions of teachers of infants so that they will become quality infant/toddler caregivers.

1. Holding and Molding: Nourishing Babies

Babies need nursing and warmth, safety and cleanliness. But beyond these physical essentials, every baby needs a body. Every baby needs someone to mold into, to drape upon, to lean against, to crawl into the lap of. "Babies need to sink into somatic certainty" on the body of the caregiver (Honig, 1985a).

1. Keynote presentation for the 30th anniversary of the American Montessori Society, February , 1990, Seattle, Washington

For this provision, the ratio of infants to caregivers becomes crucial. If three infants are assigned per caregiver, this ratio will permit a great deal of cuddling, caressing, and carrying. Even toddlers sometimes feel the need for nestling, particularly when they get forlorn that their mama or papa has been away too long and they need the body reassurance that they are not forgotten, that they do not need to sink into bottomless grey crankiness or despair while in the child care setting. Babies feel secure when held on the breast, when nuzzled cheek to cheek at shoulder, when nested in a snuggly on the chest, when draped on the tummy of a seated caregiver. Tender, careful holding is the secret ingredient for baby well-being (Winnicott, 1987). Indeed, when snugglies were provided for one group of low-income, at-risk mothers, and infant seats provided for a randomly assigned control group, then after one year the percent of securely attached rather than insecurely attached infants was significantly higher in the group whose mothers had been provided with snugglies to keep babes close upon their bodies (Anisfeld, E., Casper, V., Nazyce, M. & Cunningham, N., 1990).

Suppose a toddler suddenly misses mom. Despite his hefty bulk, he needs a good holding. The teacher who receives a disapproving message from a supervisor "Don't pick him up. He can walk by himself" will be in danger of burn-out. The wise teacher knows that body molding, body holding renew a baby's sense of surety, of trust and confidence in the caregiver. The supervisor needs more understanding of the fundamental need for

touch and holding that rekindles a little one's sense that safety and personal caring are indeed available even when the world seemed to be falling apart internally.

2. Responsive Reciprocal Partnering

Every baby needs a tuned in partner to dance with emotionally. The quality caregiver interprets signals of distress promptly and accurately (Ainsworth, 1982). She or he responds effectively and brings comfort for the baby, whether the need was for milk, a cuddle, a burp, a cooing conversation, a change of bodily position, a mobile to swipe at, or a darkened room with a warm blanket and a firm mattress so the babe could settle into sleep. Genuine focused attention (a la Briggs, 1970) is the secret. Emotional attunement will differ for each babe and for different situations. The quality caregiver needs to be a good detective in discerning what is needed.

3. Noticing Skills

Keen observational skills will clue in the caregiver to infant needs. Some want to cuddle more; some want to explore more. Some want to dash away bravely and return for home-base security bouts of cuddling in passionate gallopings back to the caregiver. Some toddlers move about with vigor. Some are butterball babies who prefer to sit and dig in the sand with their fingers rather than dash about. Some sing tunes on pitch by two years, while others are cheerfully and thoroughly off key for years to come. Tuned-in partnering means that a caregiver gets to know and communicate with each baby personally and

intimately (Honig, 1981; 1987).

Caregivers who are good noticers will best be able to help infants thrive. Particularly, notice signs of how the baby copes under stress, such as back arches, irritable crying despite tender comforting ministrations, dead or vacant eyes, or much self-stimulation, even when not tired. Sleep difficulties, rocking self back and forth, and infant passivity are signs of danger that the infant is not thriving emotionally in infant care.

Good signs are: a bouncy body, settling deeply into sleep, ability to mold and cuddle the body and accept comfort from the caregiver when stressed. Sparkling eyes, giggles, smiles, and direct eye contact with pleasure as you play with a baby are good signs that the emotional economy of the baby's body is all right. (See Table 1). Without observation practice, you may not notice tell-tale signs of worried eyes, grinding teeth at nap time, tense shoulders, compulsive body rocking, or gaze aversion.

4. Ages and Stages

Ages and stages and milestones of infant development give critical power for caregiver diagnoses and decision making. The caregiver who knows how the hand system develops from fisted to curved open, to primitive rake, to detached use of forefinger plus thumb, to superior pincer prehension, to control of wrist motions, can best plan for presentation of toys, foods and opportunities for manipulation of materials to advance the fine motor skills of the infant. The caregiver who understands that

the baby between 12 and 18 months is often engaged in vigorous attempts to find out "What will happen if?", will plan for safe explorations of materials. Water play, block stacking, play dough rolling, Magic Marker drawing - all will be provided judiciously. Babies whose caregivers do not provide materials as grist for their new learnings at each sensorimotor stage may find that infants will explore on their own terms. They may fling food, rip pictures, fill up the toilet bowl with objects - as their passionate curiosity impels them to carry out budding scientific experiments to try to understand the physics and chemistry of the world of objects.

5. Prerequisites and Windows

In preparing environments to assist the learnings of infants and toddlers, adults will observe that each new development can be understood, facilitated and gloried in or worried about, depending upon the timing of its natural appearance in an optimal caregiving situation. When is a milestone just naturally variable in a baby; when is a developmental milestone truly delayed? Some timetable windows are large - such as the window of beginning to walk. Some babies walk at 6-7 months and can climb up on a couch and walk right off into space, and take a hard tumble on a floor.. Other babies walk nearer to 13-15 months. The window is wide.

For midline pat-a-cake, the time window is narrower. Babies should be able to play pat-a-cake at midline by 7-8 months. If a baby has not brought hands together in clapping at midline by 11-

12 months, this may be cause for concern.

Windows are important; but so are prerequisites. If you want a baby to be toilet trained, do you know all the steps, (including physical maturation, use of such words as "poop", ability to sit for a fairly lengthy time period etc.) that are required before s/he can be trained? If you want an older toddler to sing ABC's or learn easy words, do you know all of the visual scanning, memory sequencing, story retelling, eye-hand coordination, auditory decoding, etc. skills that are required? Early pre-reading skills are many and varied. One of the most important of the skills is the ability to become totally absorbed by a story read by a loved adult.

6. The Dialectics of Growth and Development

The balancing dance and the dialectical nature of growth and development need to be understood. No dance comes without a few backward steps. For example, toilet training often means a few days dry, a few days with accidents. Learning any skill involves constant practice opportunities and caregiver flexibility, whether the skill is to sleep through the night and get oneself back to sleep if one wakes, or to pick up a crumb with just thumb and forefinger. Each new learning involves times of exhilaration, as when a toddler laboriously manages to heist herself to an upright position; then with joy and persistence she takes a few wobbly steps around a low table while holding on for dear life. New learnings entail not only joy. Such episodes may end with a child tired and frustrated.

Developmental theories can provide the caregiver with insights to cope with the mood swings of early learnings. Eriksonian theory, Piagetian theory, and Mahlerian theory particularly, teach us that there is always a balance - a seesawing between strivings toward positive growths and optimal learnings and accomplishments and the negative dark pole - of anger and frustration, of no - saying, of pushing away, of falling apart from the effort to push forward. The energy for more mature growth and functioning may come from the unreasonable side of a baby. The child's struggles with opposite tendencies are powerful, as, for example, the struggle between wanting to be an imperious demanding baby for whom the adult does all and also wanting to be an independent sturdy autonomous being who will not lie still for a diaper change, who will have whims and desires and dreams different from those of the adults. Such a baby will not let you feed him without having a spoon of his own so he can try too. He may forcefully push aside food even when hungry if the caregiver tries to hold the food tray away from baby, or hold baby's hands, even gently, to prevent food messing. Such an adult is insensitive to the infant's deeply felt need to "try it myself", even when the baby does indeed still need adult help in feeding.

The sensitivity of caregivers to the dialectics of quality care means also that as each new milestone is achieved the caregiver does not egg a child on. The caregiver is not trapped by the facile assumption that there are no left-over needs from

past nuclear conflicts and strivings. So for example, the toddler who is wildly no-saying and defiant, who resists being dressed or coming when you call, that same toddler still needs you to be there as a refueling station, a place of refuge when her still-baby soul is on overload, and coping with growing up out of babyhood is too much for her. Will your soothing arms and cheerful acceptance of the stormy little one still be available? Caregivers must not close off the paths to body loving and emotional acceptance so generously offered to younger babies, as they turn into toddlers and toddlers turn into the "terrible twos".

Important theoretical ideas that will help the quality caregiver cope with emotional seesawing come from Margaret Mahler and from Erik Erikson. Mahler (Kaplan,1978) reminds us that the baby struggles slowly over the first three years of life in an attempt to achieve psychological separation from the mother and individuation as a person. By about 5-6 months, the well-loved and tuned-into baby should have a bright-eyed hatched look. The baby is ready to turn outward toward the world of things and people, after months of absorption with body functions such as tummy hunger, gas bubbles, and learning that basic needs for comfort are generously met. Soon, with motor skills growing, the baby ventures off into space, practicing creeping, crawling, and uncertain early walking. This practicing subphase of the Mahlerian separation-individuation process climaxes in the wild joyfulness of the early upright walking period. The baby feels

so pleased, so mightily well endowed and capable, so secure that help is always at hand if trouble arises.

At about one and one-half years, as the baby's new mental abilities increase awareness of vulnerability, awareness of inevitable separateness, a grey cranky period sets in. The toddler becomes demanding, crabby, difficult to please. Sometimes he shadows the caregiver; sometimes he darts away. Toys are flung. Just as you thought you could get baby settled with toys for play, she piles toys in your lap and demands attention. Margaret Mahler calls this difficult toddler period "rapprochement". As the toddler gradually learns that the same loving adult who rubs his back for a nap is the person who refuses to let him hit and grab toys from a peer, the infant acquires the beginnings of "constancy". The infancy period ends as the child becomes able to deal with contradictory feelings, such as hating and loving one's parent. Separateness and aloneness are being reconciled, and the older toddler can conjure a loved one who is absent, and tolerate waiting for needs to be gratified.

Erik Erikson (1963) has taught us that throughout the dialectical nuclear conflicts of the early years, the child struggles to gain a greater measure of trust than mistrust, a greater degree of autonomous OK-ness, rather than shame about wishes and wants and doubt about the ability to be one's self and have one's own will separate from that of caregivers. Erikson has made us aware of how complex such struggles are. The ratio

of trust to mistrust includes trust of the self as well as of the caregivers one is dependent upon (Honig, 1983). Finding a favorable ratio is crucial for the well-being of a baby during the first year of life. The toddlers' attempts to find a way to balance having a strong will of their own and yet be cooperative with those loved adults who cherish and care for them can indeed make for some difficult emotional times in infancy.

Jean Piaget (1952) has been particularly helpful in delineating the achievement of sensorimotor milestones in infancy:

> object permanence
> new schemas
> means-ends separation
> spatial understandings and solutions for detour problems
> causality learning and searching for causal mechanisms to work toys
> eye-hand coordinations
> gestural and language imitations of the new and unfamiliar, the seen and unseen

John Bowlby (1958) and Mary Ainsworth (1982), ecological theorists, have sensitized us to the importance of responding to the evolutionary techniques the infant uses to attract our attention and helpfulness: the cry, the cling, the call, the padding after us on four paws. Caregivers who respond promptly to these infant signals, particularly when the infant is distressed, have babies who are securely attached to the caregiver. Adults who dislike body contact or are unexpressive may have avoidantly attached infants, who do not respond with passionate attempts to mold and cling for comfort upon reunion after separation. Some caregivers respond inappropriately and

insensitively to babies' signals of neediness. Their babes may want comfort, but are ambivalent and resistive when the adult offers a pick-up into arms. Observation skills of quality caregivers will help them note babies who are developing insecure attachments. The caregivers may have to use all the therapeutic resources they can muster to build basic trust, to provide consistent responsiveness to distress.

7. Respect Infant Rhythms and Tempos

Babies' bodies work differently. Some are curled into colic-suffering occasionally during the early months. Some hold up their heads quite early; other show head and chin bobbing for longer. Some nurse for an hour. Some are snackers; they take a few sips and then drop the nipple and look around.

Some toddlers at lunch time chew on a piece of grilled cheese sandwich tranquilly and interminably. Others wolf down food. Some sleep for two hours. Others nap lightly and not long. Tempos differ. Don't rush babies. Leisurely feeds, leisurely back rubs, leisurely baths, leisurely lives - these will allow babies of varying temperaments (whether irritable/triggery, slow-to-warm up or adaptable, easy going) to all grow up feeling secure, cheerful, and understood in the quality infant care center. Providing good mental health is the touchstone of a quality program for infants. See Table 1 for signs that your infant program is promoting emotional well-being.

Insert Table 1 About Here

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8. Language Treasures

In research after research, language richness and provision of language mastery experiences come out as significant experiences in early infancy that correlate markedly with attention span, persistence at tasks and cognitive successes a few years later (Carew,1980; Clarke-Stewart, 1973).

Caregivers need in-depth learning about language development, about early coos and babbles and holophrastic speech, about the amazing development in the middle of the second year of two and three word phrases and the functions of such phrases. For example, toddler phrases may involve recurrence, description, negation, and possession among other functions (Honig, 1982a). Teachers need to learn the mutual exclusivity principle by which toddlers decide what one word means when they only know a few others. How do you tell a doggy from a cow? Don't both have furry hides, large brown eyes, tails that wag or swish?

Language playfulness, rhyming, chanting, singing, sing-song voices, delight and expressive responsiveness to infant vocalizations-all these are caregiver characteristics that will promote the emergence of early language (Honig, 1984; 1985b; 1989b). Parallel talk, self-talk, role-playing talk, turn-

taking, game talk - all help evoke, and validate the early language efforts and pleasureful word play of babies .

Reading, reading, reading. Books are essential vitamins for the growth of babies' intellect and eloquence. Adults can foster in babies a passionate reliance on books for naps, for restful interludes, for solitary pleasures, for refreshment toward the ends of long afternoons in child care. The thoughtful caregiver is the crucial conduit. The caregiver can seek out just the kinds of cardboard, cloth, plastic and other books that pleasure a baby's growing sense of sounds and familiar dear objects and persons. Treasures such as "Goodnight Moon" will be beloved by the time baby reaches the first birthday.

9. Promote Baby Altruism

The work of Yarrow and colleagues pinpoints the early toddler period as one where tots tune into the distress of others and learn to extend empathy and helpful gestures (Pines , 1979). The researchers' best prescription for a baby altruist is for the adult to model innumerable small acts of kindness, such as caressing hair gently if a baby has fallen and gotten a bump and a scare, and to be very firm about rules that social disputes with peers over toys or space must not be resolved by aggression or hurting others.

10. Aesthetic Joys

Babies enjoy beauty. Put on leisurely waltzes and whirl babes around in arms. Give toddlers large nylon colorful squares and let them sway and twirl and dance to gentle music. Put up

colorful pictures of beautiful snow scenes or animals on the lower walls of the child care room. Laminate the pictures if possible so they will survive curious picking fingers for a longer period!

Use soft textures, play lovely melodies, show art pictures, bring in houseplants that gracefully cascade overhead, use pillows and throws on mattresses to create soft textured spaces. Blow bubbles. Bring in pieces of velvet and fur for babies to feel. Provide dress-up clothes and draping fabrics so babies can adorn themselves. Stimulate baby senses with pleasurable experiences, such as sniffing scents of grapefruit freshly cut or vanilla or cinnamon (Honig & Lally, 1981, pp.87-105).

11. Partnership with Parents

Working with parents takes special skills. Gordon's (1970) Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) skills are particularly useful and easy to learn. PET skills help us become empathic with parental concerns. They tune us into who owns a particular problem - the parent, the caregiver, the baby - or any combination of players. Be appreciative of parental contributions to the well-being of their babies. Even when caregivers learn to use "Active listening" skills to discover empathically what troubles or worries a parent, that does not mean caregivers will be able to solve parent anxieties or jealousies of the caregiver or resentments over the demands of infants or guilt over leaving a baby in child care for long hours daily. Still, the PET Transactional Analysis skills are very

helpful tools. Active listening can indeed clue adults into the signals of worry or distress not only of other adults but of children too. Practice and genuine desire to be partners in the marvelous world of infant cherishing will help increase your expertise in making a parent feel comfortable and secure in their parent work and in your caregiver work.

12. Master Subtle Teacher Skills

Caregivers often seem like magicians. They can lure babies into learning. They can refocus a child headed for mischief and disorganization onto an appropriate activity. Teacher skills are important. How can you arrange learning activity centers for toddlers to entice them into lengthy explorations of materials and toys? How can you arrange dramatic play environments that will nourish the rich sociodramatic play and positive peer interactions that presage good social relationships? How can you use positive discipline techniques that will enhance a child's cooperative and appropriate activity and maintain good self-esteem while doing so? (Honig & Wittmer, 1990).

Create magic triangles to focus a babe on materials and activity rather than on your pressures on him or on yourself (Honig, 1982b). Dance developmental ladders; lure babies into activities just a wee bit difficult, puzzling, different, more complex. Dance down and scaffold for them so that a frustrating activity becomes easier or more comprehensible. Or a task requirement becomes something the baby can tackle because you have made the work somewhat easier.

Hone your matchmaking skills (Honig, 1982b). Find out what the interests of every particular child are. Present activities and toys and opportunities for learning that are appealing for each child. One babe will search for a favorite chewable toy under a washcloth. Another will only be motivated to look if you hide a piece of cracker. One toddler loves to paint with the easel but is uncomfortable with cornstarch and water gloop. Another loves to dig in up to the elbows in finger paint. Be sensitive to the skills, interests, and discomforts of each child. Work toward extending attention span. Lure and encourage so that babies stretch their persistence and determination to try new tasks or more complex toys. Read the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1986) guidelines for setting up quality infant care programs.

13. Hone Your Metacognitive Skills

Help yourself think about your infant/toddler caregiving work. How comfortable are you with babies' overwhelming neediness? How frustrated do you get when a developmental new learning, such as drinking with a cup results often in the early stages in spills and mess? Do you prefer tiny babies and perhaps infantilize toddlers by too much holding? Or do you try to push toddlers too quickly for independence so that not enough lap and hug time is generously offered?

Can you reframe? When kids mess food in their hair at lunch time, do you wilt in despair or irritation - or do you convince yourself that this was a cheap exotic vegetable shampoo

application! Do you use reframing and a sense of humor to get you through days? How much support do you have from significant others- back rubs, good times in leisure recreation - to prevent burnout? Do you feel comfortable with the dependency and intimacy of tiny ones - or does too much intimate body contact bother you? Metacognitive work will keep you on your toes, ever renewing your faith in yourself and your intellectual spunk and sparkle for carrying out a noble job - high-quality infant/toddler caregiving.

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Table 1

Signs of Good Infant Mental Health

Molds and relaxes deeply into beloved caregiver's body when offered comfort for distress

Reaches toward, calls toward, or moves toward beloved caregiver when needing comfort

Moves bowels regularly (no chronic constipation or diarrhea)

Sparkling eyes

Sleeps deeply, even though baby may wake for night nursings

When distressed, gives a loud cry to signal neediness

Can grin with welcome to stranger when safely cuddled in arms of beloved caregiver

Can self-comfort with thumb-sucking when tired or mildly upset

Delights in hugging, smooching, poking fingers into mouth of, or pulling eyeglasses off face of beloved caregiver: feels ownership of special adult; jabbers a lot and tried to communicate with special adults

As toddler, becomes absorbed in activities; sings to self; explores and handles materials and tries out actions on materials for fairly lengthy periods

Loves to be read to and sinks into caregiver's lap and attends with interest

Toddler looks upset if a peer is upset, crying or hurt

Looks directly at adult who is in responsive turn-taking communication; is not avoidant with eyes with familiar adults

Enjoys self-feeding and doesn't mind messiness

Genuine curiosity and interest in outside world of people and objects

Shows focused quality to play and interactions; does not wander randomly; does not run away constantly or sidle; has direct interactions and contacts with materials and people

Body has bounce; is not floppy or rigid